



Speech by

**Mr J. HEGARTY**

**MEMBER FOR REDLANDS**

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Hansard 17 September 1998

**MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES**

**Mr HEGARTY** (Redlands—NPA) (6.10 p.m.): I have pleasure in rising tonight to second this motion. I support the motion because I am committed to ensuring the strength and effectiveness of the Queensland fire service. Unfortunately, the Minister does not share this commitment. Ever since the minority Beattie Labor Government came to office, the Minister has sought time and time again to undermine the board of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority. That board has made a valuable contribution to the management and operation of the Queensland fire service. It has helped turn the fire service around and restore some dignity to the men and women who risk their lives on a regular basis to protect the lives and property of Queenslanders.

Listening to the speech delivered by my colleague the shadow Minister I was reminded of the disgraceful way that Tom Burns, a former Labor Minister for Emergency Services, treated officers in the fire service. The comments by Mr Burns were a great embarrassment to the Goss Labor Government. Now this new Minister is following in his footsteps. Aided by her Labor Party friend and accomplice Ron Attwood, the husband of the member for Mount Ommaney, the Minister has used every opportunity to try to discredit the QFRA board. We have already heard today that Mr Attwood is a departmental officer who is paid to work in the Minister's office. What we have not heard is the way Mr Attwood is trying to push the Minister into disbanding the statutory authority status of the QFRA in order to return control of the fire service to the Department of Emergency Services. We know that Mr Attwood is behind this move because we know that the Minister is having difficulty in coming to grips with the challenges of her portfolio.

In spite of the fact that he is a public servant and that his wages are paid by the QFRA, Mr Attwood acts as a political adviser to the Minister. Nearly every day this week and in previous sitting weeks he has been sitting in the public gallery observing question time. He does not sit on his own. He does not try to appear as an impartial public servant. He sits right smack in the middle of Labor ministerial staff. Perhaps he is there so that he can rush down to the Chamber and assist the Minister with complex questions about the fire service. Perhaps he is there so that he can give signals—thumbs up, thumbs down—to the Minister. Perhaps he is there because he is a proud husband and wants to look at his wife. Or perhaps he is there because he has to be, because he is a political adviser to the Minister. I think that is more likely the rationale for Mr Attwood's presence in the gallery. Why else would he need to be in the Chamber during the most political part of the day's proceedings? I think Mr Attwood has had the opportunity to view the PricewaterhouseCoopers report to which the Minister so often refers. By comparison, I point out that the QFRA board has not seen the report. However, I think there is every chance that Mr Attwood has. After all, why else would Mr Attwood need to sit through question time?

We have an interesting scenario here. On one hand, we have the board of a statutory authority not being afforded the courtesy of viewing this report while, on the other hand, we have an employee of the board, Mr Attwood, who in all likelihood has seen a copy of the report. I hold grave concerns for the ability of the Minister and the motivation of Ron Attwood. There is something fishy about Mr Attwood's involvement in this process. I urge the Minister to stop undermining the QFRA, to start listening to board members and to get on with the job of strengthening the Queensland fire service. The Minister ought to be condemned if she continues with her actions to date. I urge members of this House to support the motion for that reason alone.

The former Minister, the member for Southport, built up the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority. It would be a detrimental step for all the citizens of Queensland if the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority were to revert to its previous position prior to the reforms that were initiated by the member for Southport. I am sure that when he speaks to this motion tonight he will be outlining some of the great steps that have put the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority in the position that it is in today. It is a leader in the provision of fire services in Australia. I would hate to see any detrimental stepping back from the sound footing that it is now on and from the commendable job that the board has done to date. It should not be undermined; it should be supported in every way possible. I urge the Minister to do so. I urge members of the House to support this motion and vote against the deplorable way in which the Minister has handled this matter to date.

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